

Slaves who built the pyramids packed their burdens better than Shortgrassers are facing this dry winter. Each morning in the coffee house, feeds and feeding dominate the conversation. Woeful recounts are made daily of the horrors of the dehydrated '50s. Strangers down their coffee and break for the door to escape the mournful tales of the natives.

One thing different about this drouth is you don't hear anyone talking about feeding his wool clip. Thirty cent wool converts so poorly into \$80 feed that the ratio excludes mention of wool money. You never heard of a diamond merchant trafficking in low grade coat. The price of livestock feed is as unrelated to the wool market as toe dancing is to working in a lumber camp. Non-negotiable crops have no place in the feed market.

The other day we heard that an English firm was making textiles from rabbit fur. The report arrived too late to cause any excitement among the sheep herding fraternity. Rabbits are, I believe, the last animate or inanimate object that could be utilized to compete with wool. Every company in the world that ever owned as much as one test tube and one bunsen burner has already discovered 40 different ways to make synthetic fiber from everything from petroleum products to household trash. There's no use becoming disturbed because rabbit growers are going to join the crowd.

Dry weather is what has the rancher cornered now. Mark these words: If it'd rain tonight all over the ranch country, ranchmen could count on reaching the break-even point by the first quarter of 1972.

All this moaning about high feed bills could be wiped away by 12 or 13 months of favorable weather and strong market conditions. By this time next year, feed dealers would have their accounts receivable whittled down to a camel's hair. Given a few extra breaks, it might not take that long to heal up the damage of the past few months.

Drouths are a deceptive type of calamity. As their capital disappears, they panic. False feelings of insecurity develop as they see baby lambs abandoned by their mothers, or baby calves standing around a feed ground begging for more milk.

Bare ground and high winds destroy their reasoning. Time gets out of focus. Four or five years of below normal moisture is stretched into a limitless expanse of time, to the degree that people are disoriented. You hear, for instance, men saying that they are going to start lambing on the 65th day of March. All conception of the calendar months are lost. Weeks seem to last for 30 days and years run into the 400 bracket. Eight-day alarm clocks become as impractical as a sun dial.

Those hutch and hare farmers had better do some checking before they go too heavy for the raw fiber raising game. If they could take some tallies on what's hitting us now, they wouldn't be so interested in shearing their rabbits.

The almanac says that February is going to be a wet month. I say that February had better get busy...